NSF Program:
Transitions from Childhood to the Workforce

A Multidisciplinary Research on Stereotypes,
Prejudice, Tolerance, and Rights:
Educating Children for Living in Diverse Cultures

Organized by

Charles Stangor
Department of Psychology

Melanie Killen
Department of Human Development

University of Maryland
College Park

Meeting dates and location:

June 24 - 26, 1999
Washington, D.C.
and
November 4 - 6, 1999
Bethesda, Maryland

Foreword

The increased diversification of the educational system and workforce is currently creating a pressing challenge to United States society. The percentage of United States citizens who are members of non-white groups is increasing annually, and although this diversity brings the potential of the mutual exchange of diverse talents and viewpoints, it also has the potential to produce intergroup intolerance, prejudice, conflict, the relative exclusion of some groups from mainstream society, and the compounding of existing group differences in academic achievement and career success.   It is important that we adopt educational policies that reduce the negative impact of prejudice in order to create positive intergroup relations, and to maximize human capital and the economic opportunities available to all citizens.

Children develop strong views about fairness and justice, and at the same time acquire stereotypic knowledge about others that sometimes leads to prejudice and negative intergroup attitudes. Negative beliefs about others often contribute to discrimination and group conflict, and when they become part of a cultural structure they have profound impact on the development of children. For instance, children who believe that their group is academically inferior have been found to perform more poorly on standardized tests and to express less interest in academics.

Given the call for a national priority on education, and the important impact of group differences on children's educational achievement, it is essential that scholars from different areas work together to develop standard research approaches and programs for understanding how to help children acquire a positive understanding of human diversity and to improve the ability of children to respond to negative intergroup attitudes.

We organized two conferences with the goal of bringing together research scholars who are concerned with and knowledgeable about the development of prejudice, stereotypes, tolerance, and rights, and the impact of these beliefs on children, as well as the potential educational interventions that may be successful in reducing the development of prejudice and negative stereotypes about others. The first conference included researchers at various stages of their careers in the fields of education, psychology, and sociology. In this conference, small group discussions met and identified three interrelated research areas which were discussed in detail by the larger group. The second conference was broadened to include educators and administrators who have experience in pre-school, elementary, and high school education, and teacher training, as well as researchers in different areas of education, learning, and development. The goal of the second conference was to develop multi-disciplinary, multi-site proposals in the three general areas identified by the conference participants at the first conference. Small groups met to work out the specifics of research proposals which are currently in preparation.

The conferences were unique in that they provided contact among scholars from different, and yet intersecting domains. This report outlines three basic research areas that the conference participants identified as most critical for continued national funding.

1. **The development of stereotypes, prejudice, and rights in children**. When do children learn about the stereotypes of social groups? By what means is this knowledge acquired by them? How does the educational system help promote positive group relations and reduce negative intergroup attitudes? When do children begin to use their beliefs to make judgments about themselves and others? How do beliefs about the exclusion of others relate to children's understanding of moral principles, such as individual rights? How are judgments about rights related to issues of social identity and social categorization? How do children's cognitive and social-cognitive skills contribute to their understanding of social groups and stereotypes?

2. **Negative consequences of prejudice on children's social, emotional, moral, and cognitive well-being**. How and when do children from minority groups internalize stereotypes and prejudice, and at what developmental stage does this occur?   What are the negative consequences of prejudice and intergroup intolerance on children's self-concept? How do stereotypic expectations about the academic potential of one's gender or ethnic group influence school achievement, and academic and career choices?

3. **Interventions for reducing stereotypes and prejudice, and for enhancing positive intergroup attitudes.** What types of educational interventions have proved most useful in reducing stereotyping and prejudice and for enhancing a sense of rights in children? How can existing theoretical knowledge be used to design new interventions? How do teachers react to these interventions, and how can they be presented to teachers to make them most effective? What is the long-term impact of these interventions?

This report contains a list of specific recommended research questions concerning these three research issues that should be considered in future research agendas for The Transitions from Childhood to the Workforce Initiative.   For each of the three research questions, the following guidelines should apply:

1. The research issue should have both theoretical as well as practical implications. The research should be conducted in the school systems in interaction with educators. An effort should be made to use the knowledge gained from the research to modify and improve educational models and curricula and to provide practical information for how teachers manage children's behavior in the classroom.

2. The research question should be addressed from a multi-disciplinary perspective. For instance, the contributions of psychologists, sociologists, and educators could be combined.

3. The research question should be addressed through the collection of large-scale databases (both survey and observational) at a representative sample of schools and including children from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The currently available databases do not directly assess the issues proposed to be important by the participants in this conference, and the collection of such data would improve the ability to generalize findings.

Next, we list brief summaries of the issues in the three general areas that we identified as central to the issue of prejudice, intolerance, and rights in children. We include a list of research questions that must be addressed in order to understand and begin to solve the problems outlined above.

The Development of Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Rights in Children

Developmental and social psychologists have begun to map the cognitive, social and emotional processes that lead to the development of stereotypes, prejudice and rights in children. The difficulty in addressing this complex problem is these negative intergroup interactions are determined by family factors, cultural factors (such as differences between ethnic groups), community factors (neighborhoods), social factors (such as the social relationships among peers or among ethnic groups in a city) as well as personal factors (such as social identity and social categorization). As a result, there are a wide variety of approaches to understanding this complex topic.

Large representative datasets, which would allow a systematic comparison and validation of these theories, are not currently available. It is suggested that a diverse set of researchers pool their efforts in a large-scale study in order to attempt to understand the simultaneous and interacting effects of these different variables, using several different research approaches. The specific questions that need to be addressed in such studies include:

1. What are the cognitive, emotional, social and cultural mechanisms of the formation of stereotypes, prejudice, and a conception of rights? How do these variables interact, and which are most important?

2. What are the developmental trajectories of children's understanding of group differences and what is the impact of this knowledge on behavior?

3. What is the relationship between children's moral reasoning, including their concepts of rights and fairness, and their stereotyping and prejudice?

4. How does the development of prejudice, stereotypes and rights differ for children from different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and genders?

5. When do children begin to use their stereotypes to make decisions about other children?

6. What is the relation between ingroup identity and tolerance for members of other groups, and how does this change with age?

7. In what ways are prejudice and negative intergroup attitudes supported and maintained by the social structure of the school and classroom?

8. How do peer norms and sanctions contribute to the development and maintenance of negative intergroup attitudes? Are some children particularly vigilant about protecting and reinforcing group norms, thereby contributing to group differences?

9. How do different educational models affect children's attitudes and behaviors in terms of stereotypes, prejudice and rights?

Negative Consequences of Prejudice on Children's Social, Emotional, Moral, and Cognitive Well-being

Although intolerant attitudes, including stereotypes and prejudice may in some cases produce negative behaviors by one group toward another, they also have a more insidious effect upon the members of the groups. Research has shown that students' standardized test performances are depressed by "stereotype threat," which is apprehension about one's behavior, performance, or characteristics confirming a negative stereotype. More generally, children's expectations about their success and their identification with and effort in school can be profoundly influenced by stereotypes about their own achievement. Research is needed to address more fully the impact of stereotypes on the members of disadvantaged groups and the potential mechanisms that children may use to cope with these negative expectancies.

The specific research questions to be addressed include:

1. How are children's emotional reactions, behavior, and self-concept affected by expectations that their ethnic or gender group lacks intellectual ability?

2. What role can socialization, from other children, parents and peers, play in buffering the impact of stereotypes and prejudice on children's functioning?

3. At what stage of development do children become meaningfully vulnerable to stereotypes about their group (e.g. when does their school performance become affected by group stereotypes?)

4. What personality and background factors (such as self-schemas, school identification, self-efficacy, self-worth, the perceived malleability of ability, and text anxiety) may mediate the development of such vulnerabilities?

5. Through which cognitive and motivational mechanisms are cognitive capacities influenced by the onset of expectations about the negative stereotypes of one's group?

6. What are the various strategies that individuals might use to shield themselves from the negative implications of stereotypes?

7. What are the long-term emotional and cognitive consequences of being stereotyped (e.g., as intellectually inferior)?

8. How are teacher's beliefs and expectations about group differences communicated to children, and how does this communication influence their performance?

9. By what means do stereotypes influence children's performance? To what extent are motivation, attention, effort, achievement, and skill learning influenced by stereotypes?

Interventions for Reducing Stereotypes and Prejudice, and for Enhancing Positive Intergroup Attitudes

Research suggests that social stereotyping is associated with many dysfunctional consequences for children. Educators and social scientists have called for efforts to reduce social stereotyping and prejudice among children. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about how best to reduce negative intergroup attitudes among children. Many programs have been developed and implemented, but few have been carefully evaluated. Those programs that have been evaluated show contradictory patterns of results, and when programs do succeed in reducing intergroup bias, the resulting changes in attitudes are often very small.

As a result, an exceedingly important agenda for future research concerns the development of new programs for educating children about group diversity, as well as clear guidelines for evaluating the success of such programs. One approach to improving the effectiveness of interventions is to relate them to existing theoretical knowledge. These programs should pay increased attention to theoretical and empirical work on attitude formation and change, social norms, moral reasoning, categorization, and identity, and should have a developmental focus. Interventions that are grounded in theory are more likely to be effective, and existing theory can provide considerable guidance about the kinds of interventions that will work. Furthermore, it will be useful to examine ways in which the teaching of intergroup tolerance can be incorporated into the existing school day of the student, rather than only through developing new programs.

The following research questions were seen as critical:

1. What are the stability and generality of stereotypes and prejudice and how successful are attempts to change them?

2. What are the most useful assessments of stereotypes and prejudice? What is the validity of these measures, and how can they be improved?

3. How can existing theories about the development and use of stereotypes and prejudice be used to develop new and effective interventions?

4. What are the features of existing programs designed to improve intergroup relations that have proved the most successful?

5. What are the best criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs (e.g. through which types of studies, and using which types of measures?)

6. What is the cost-effectiveness of such interventions, and how can this effectiveness be best assessed?

7. Are interventions equally effective at producing changes for children from different ages, social groups, and social contexts?

8. How might recent advancements derived from the theoretical and empirical study of the formation and functioning of social stereotyping in children be applied to new intervention design?

9. What are the implications of personality variables and developmental changes across age level for the effectiveness of interventions to prevent the development of negative intergroup attitudes?

Conference Participants

Frances E. Aboud (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Professor
Department of Psychology
1205 Dr Penfield Ave
McGill University
Montreal PQ
Canada H3A 1B1

Alicia Ardila-Rey (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Graduate Student
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742-1131

Joshua Aronson (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Texas, Austin
Austin, TX 78712

Rebecca S. Bigler (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
330 Mezes Hall
University of Texas, Austin
Austin, TX 78712

Sherryl Browne-Graves (Conference # 2)
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Foundations
and Counseling Programs
695 Park Ave
Hunter College, CUNY
New York, NY 10021

Virginia Casper (Conference # 2)
Director of the Infant and Parent Development
and Early Intervention Program
Bank Street School
610 W. 112th St.
New York City, NY 10025

David Crystal (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057-1001

Daniel Hart (Conference #2)
Associate Dean and Professor
College of Arts and Sciences
Dept. of Psychology
Rutgers University
Camden, NJ 08102

Joseph Hawkins (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Senior Research Scientist
American Institutes for Research
Suite 400
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007

Stacey Horn (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Graduate Student
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742-1131

Anita Woolfolk Hoy (Conference # 2)
Professor
159A Ramseyer Hall
29 W Woodruff Ave
Ohio State University
Columbus, OH 43210

Melanie Killen (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Professor and Associate Director, Center for Children,
Relationships, and Culture
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742-1131

Jennie Kim (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Graduate Student
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
College Park, MD 20742-1131
410.884.5484

Carol Martin (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Professor
Department of Family Resources & Human Development
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-2502

Nancy McCullough (Conference #2)
Teacher, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Maryland Teacher in Residence, Street Law, Inc.
Street Law, Inc.
1600 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-2901

Heidi McGlothlin (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Graduate Student
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742-1131

Nancy Nager (Conference #2)
Graduate Faculty
Bank Street College of Education
610 W 112th Street
New York City, NY 10025

Yoonjung Park (Conference #2)
Graduate Student
Department of Human Development
3304 Benjamin Building
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-1132

Debra Roberts (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
525 Bryant Street
Howard University
Washington, D.C 20059.

Harriett Romo (Conference # 2)
Associate Professor
Division of Social and Policy Sciences
University of Texas, San Antonio
6900 North Loop, 1604 West
San Antonio, TX 78249-0654

Diane Ruble (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Professor
New York University
Department of Psychology
6 Washington Place, Room 751
New York, NY 10003

Martin Ruck (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Psychology
Graduate School and University Center
City University of New York
365 Fifth Ave
New York, NY 10016-4309

Gretchen Sechrist (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Graduate Student
Department of Psychology
1141 Zoo-Psyc Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742

Pat Sherman (Conference # 2)
Graduate Faculty
Bank Street College of Education
610 W 112th Street
New York City, NY 10025

Mark Schaller (Conference # 1)
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
University of British Columbia
2136 West Mall
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6T 1Z4

Nikki Slocum (Conference #2)
Graduate Student
Dept. of Psychology
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057-1001

Charles Stangor (Conference #s 1 and 2)
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
1141 Zoo-Psyc Building
University of Maryland, College Park
College Park, MD 20742

Elliot Turiel (Conference # 1)
Associate Dean and Professor
School of Education
Tolman Hall
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720

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Cecilia Wainryb (Conference # 1)
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Patricia Wang-Iverson (Conference #2)
Senior Associate, Mid-Atlantic Eisenhower Consortium
for Mathematics and Science Education
Research for Better Schools
444 N Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19123-4107

Claire Ellen Weinstein (Conference # 2)
Professor
Dept of Educational Psychology
SZB 504, Mail Code: D5800
University of Texas, Austin
Austin, TX 78712-1296

Judy Zimmer (Conference # 2)
Education Director
Street Law, Inc.
1600 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-2901